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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
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INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000353

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2018
TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [KMPI](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: FATAH SIXTH CONGRESS PREPARATIONS STALEMATED BY
CONTROVERSY

REF: (A) JERUSALEM 265 (B) JERUSALEM 137

Classified By: Classified by Consul General Jake Walles for Reasons 1.4
(b,d).

11. (C) Summary: Fatah remains divided over preparations for the Sixth Congress. Grassroots leaders reject current Fatah Central Committee (FCC) preparations, which they contend are designed to reconfirm Fatah's Old Guard leadership. Internal Fatah elections continue in most of the West Bank, but are stalled in Ramallah and Nablus. End Summary.

FCC: Favors Small Sixth Congress
of Hand-Picked Fatah Members

12. (C) Fatah members are sharply divided over preparations for a Sixth Congress, which would determine the movement's leadership. The FCC wants a smaller Congress that includes a large proportion of hand-picked officials, at the expense of elected leaders. Grassroots Fatah leaders, including allies of jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti, say they expect to attend the Congress and want a large Congress with broad participation from the movement. According to Fatah contacts, competing ideas are still far apart, with the number of proposed participants ranging from 1500 to 3000.

Grassroots Opposition

13. (C) Fatah grassroots leaders Qadura Faris and Hussein al Sheikh separately told Pol Specialist that FCC efforts to manipulate the outcome of the Sixth Congress make it less likely than ever that the Congress will be held. Faris said FCC members want only to reconfirm their positions, so they are exploiting Barghouti's absence and excluding "hundreds" of Fatah grassroots leaders from Congress preparations. Al Sheikh said the failure of the FCC preparatory committee to consult will mean there is no Congress.

14. (C) FRC member Mohammed Dahlan told the Consul General that the FCC is "trying to reinvent themselves" and creating rules in preparing for the conference to ensure their own re-election. He said he will oppose such a Congress and threatened that if the FCC proceeds in this manner he will hold an alternate, broad-based Congress to elect an alternate FCC. He added "if they continue these games, the Congress will not go ahead," because "it won't work to finally have this Congress after twenty years and to re-elect the same guys." Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) member Abdel Minem Wahdan told Pol Specialist that he interprets Dahlan's return to Ramallah as signaling the Gazan leader's concerns that FCC members are serious about retaining their own leadership roles through the Congress. Wahdan said he expects the FCC to reject the Congress if they perceive it is going to produce a new leadership.

No Agreement on

15. (C) FRC member Samir Shehadah also told Pol Specialist that Fatah is divided over the draft political platform to be discussed by the Congress. He said the current draft is incoherent, does not address Fatah's current structural conflict, and does not decide whether Fatah should become a political party or remain a liberation movement. According to Shehadah, once convened, the Congress is the only body authorized to endorse a new Fatah platform.

Ramallah and Nablus: Challenge
to Complete Regional Elections

16. (C) According to the FCC's Mobilization and Discipline (MAD) Committee Director Mohammed Madani, MAD is trying to complete internal Fatah elections, but facing problems in Ramallah and Nablus and may appoint new leaders. Madani told Pol Specialist that MAD will push hard for elections and appointments are a last resort. However, Fatah's grassroots leaders reject appointing leaders, and Faris told Pol specialist they will block any such effort by MAD. Rasmi Hamayel, an elected member of Ramallah's Fatah regional committee said MAD has not tried to convene elections in Ramallah and neither he nor any other members who were elected in 1998 will accept being replaced by unelected leaders.

Comment

17. (C) Although there is still a chance that Fatah will use

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internal elections and the Sixth Congress to present the public with a representative leadership and new political platform, this outcome seems remote. Fatah members are not engaging in a coherent internal debate on key questions surrounding the Congress, and the serious split between FCC members who are preparing for the Congress and prominent grassroots leaders, who are being excluded from the preparations, seems to be widening. These grassroots leaders argue that the Congress must have a broader base and be more representative to meet the needs and interests of Fatah members. Some of them may genuinely want to see a more democratic Congress for its own sake, but others may be trying to manipulate the proposed Congress composition to result in their election to leadership roles. Many Fatah contacts express concern that the current confrontation between the FCC and grassroots leaders is serious enough to risk splintering Fatah.

WALLES